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THE JEWISH HOME.

BY PROFESSOR ABRAM S. ISAACS.

IN our rapid-transit age, pious sentiment has lost much of its potency, and cherished traditions that enforced certain vital truths disappear as surely as the trees that once gave beauty and shade to our city streets. We cannot pause by the way for quiet reverie; we dare not rest in our era of competition. The wheels must incessantly turn, the energies be urged ever at breakneck speed. Home, affection, family happiness, the household altar around which cluster such inspiring ideals, all must be imperilled, if not sacrificed, in the mad race for gold, fame, preferment. And the danger threatening that magic isle of safety, the home, can no longer be denied.

Undoubtedly, Jewish ideals suffer, like ideals in general, from the spur and strain of present-day conditions, and much that was for ages regarded as sacred and inviolable in character and custom has vanished in the change of clime and environment. Much, however, is still unaffected, so strong and time-proof are the olden foundations. Unlike the temple of Philæ, with its wondrous associations, which has been gradually submerged with the introduction of modern irrigation methods in Egypt, the Jewish home, with its memories as historic and venerable, continues practically unchanged in spirit, even in our American atmosphere. Its graceful lines are as clear, its inspirations as effective, its basic principles as potent as ever. Now, the American Israelite does not wish to be differentiated from his brother of another creed in all that pertains to citizenship, nor does he desire to be singled out for praise or censure as if he were an anomaly or an anachronism. Yet his home is certainly unique, and he need not be unduly sensitive if he be asked for the secret of that household's charm and vitality. What qualities give it undefinable power?

What formative influences are enshrined under its roof to make it one of the chief factors in the Jew's preservation? What subtle magic, even to-day with so many disintegrating tendencies, invests it with such strength and permanence? In other words, what does the Jewish home stand for?

1. It stands, first, for religion. That element is its basic principle, which enters as much into the home as into the synagogue, and in some respects is more prominent in the household. It associates religion with the daily life of the family and the individual, and blends ideal influences with the domestic atmosphere. On the very threshold, on the door-post of the house, is seen a rectangular piece of parchment, inscribed with two sections from Deuteronomy—a Mosaic command scrupulously observed for thousands of years—which embody the foundation of Jewish belief, the unity of God and the injunction to love Him with heart, soul and might, and to teach that belief to one's children—"and thou shalt write them on the door-post of thy house and on thy gates." With such a symbol ever present, the religious environment is undeniable. The historic festivals are scenes of family reunion. Sabbath eve is welcomed by a special ceremonial—when the Sabbath light is lit, emblem of happiness, and the double loaf of bread adorns the table, to signify the double portion which the Israelites of old were to gather in the wilderness on the sixth day, so as to keep the Sabbath holy. And even if in our keen competitive era a closed Saturday is impossible among the large majority of employees and employers, some distinction is preserved, the women and children attend service, household work is lightened. Each festival has its appropriate greeting, in whose message young and old share. There is blessing after meals, with traditional songs and melodies for all. There is nothing harsh or repressive in such an atmosphere—it spells joyousness, mutual affection, domestic peace. The home is in the shadow of the Almighty, who is no tyrant, but Father, Counsellor, Friend. It is an altar, with the parents as priest and priestess, and the impression is never lost on the children.

2. It stands for the historical consciousness of the Jewish people, being thus a school of knowledge and loyalty. Each prayer and ceremony, each festival and traditional observance, all have a meaning and history which the parent is commanded to make known to the child as the highest duty. These recall the past

with wonderful vividness and become eloquent object-lessons, as scenes of defeat or triumph, of the glory of national independence or the shame of exile are depicted. The race-consciousness is thus early developed and has something ennobling in its call to loyalty and sense of kinship with the leaders who have passed away. From childhood thus the boy and girl learn the story of their people. As they witness the Passover ceremonies, the centuries of serfdom in Egypt—a dim forecast of later serfdom in modern lands like Russia and Roumania—flash before their vision, and how genuine is the feeling of gratitude! As they learn the graceful lessons of Tabernacles, the harvest festival, when, amid thanksgivings for the fruits of the season, they were to remember the lowly huts wherein their ancestors sojourned when emigrants from Egypt, are they not taught humility and the law of modest living? When they light the lights on the feast of Dedication, the era of the Maccabees is brought close to our time, inspiring them to be loyal to their religious duties, whatever the obstacle. Hence the home is both place of worship and of instruction.

3. It stands for the unities of family life—those essential virtues which bless humanity and sanctify the home. Nothing can surpass the affection, the mutual helpfulness, the sentiment of reverence that unify the typical Jewish household. Parents and children vie with each other in intensifying and deepening the atmosphere of love. Under such conditions, happiness can result even if there is an absence of wealth and glitter, and the quiet, gentle life is preferred to social extravagance. The spirit of domestic love which permeates "The Cotter's Saturday Night" unconsciously suggests the Jewish home—the ties that bind parents and children are enduring in childhood and maturity, stretching out through every experience. In the ambitions of their sons and daughters, in their tasks and troubles, the parents show the keenest sympathy, always their patient and kindly advisers, ever spurring them on in their studies and pursuits, and placing before them the loftiest ideals. And, in turn, the child has respect and reverence for the parent, makes rapid progress in school, largely because of parental interest, and develops steadily along helpful lines under the impetus of a cultured home.

Need it be surprising, then, if the Jewish home stands for such vital factors that its influence should be so unmistakably

reflected in the status of the Jew—in his character, aims, acquirements, ideals? If in the past that home was a preservative, nourishing and shielding the most beautiful virtues, and furnishing examples of domestic peace and purity in ages when courts were dissolute and people were given over to coarse amusements and degrading superstitions, is it to be wondered at that its influence proves so salutary in our era? It still has power to preserve from fashionable vices, to insure marriage sanctity, to inculcate habits of self-restraint and self-control. The most formidable of present-day evils are intemperance and divorce, and these have reached proportions that are ominous for the future. Now, there are no statistics as to intemperance among Jews, simply because cases are so infrequent; and it may safely be affirmed that a Jewish drunkard is a rarity, and still rarer any instance where a home has been destroyed by a drunken parent. There is an innate horror of excesses and vicious living—the home example has instilled the lesson of self-control and moderation. Undoubtedly the dietary laws have accustomed the Jew to habits of self-restraint. It must not be imagined, however, that his home atmosphere is one of repression, of gloom, of asceticism; it is just the reverse, and hence there is little danger of swinging to the opposite extreme in later years. As to the divorce evil, here, too, there is a suggestive absence of data for generalization; but instances are exceedingly rare, especially where traditional principles are essentially maintained. No apprehension need be felt, under such safeguards, that the evil can ever gain a firm foothold in representative Jewish circles.

The subject now presents itself as to Christianity's influence on the Jewish home, and as to any recognition of its worth. The thoughtful, intelligent Jewish home cannot but acknowledge elements in the Christian religion and practice which make for human betterment, and which here on American soil have such magnificent expression in agencies that uplift and refine. Of course, this is a matter which, if discussed at too great length, might lead one into the labyrinth of theology and Scriptural interpretation. Without hesitation, the Jew accepts the spirit of the new movement which emphasizes the central unities of all religions, whatever are the points of disagreement that set the creeds apart. He has too long suffered from the narrowness of others to cherish the narrow outlook. He feels the borderland

widening and does his duty, when he consistently can, to bridge over the chasm and soften old-time asperities. The Ghetto was not originally a Jewish creation, but was forced upon the Jew with the gabardine and the yellow badge; and he is held responsible for an exclusiveness that is not inherent in Judaism, for a hateful and bigoted point of view which is to be credited to the persecutor, not to the persecuted. To-day the Jewish home is as open as was Abraham's tent in the legend. There is no uplifted spear at the portal, no hostile air within, but the spirit of the Mosaic command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and of the Hebrew prophet's declaration, "My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations." The broad teachings of the Jewish home, its kindly attitude towards mankind, find eloquent expression, not in mere sentimental phrases, but in the growing tendency of Israelites to bequeath gifts to education and charity, without distinction of creed.

In this analysis of the principles for which the Jewish home stands, there has been no conscious exaggeration. Traits have not been idealized, nor doctrines too broadly interpreted. In fact, a certain restraint has been felt, as if one were reluctant to describe its atmosphere, for it courts no publicity or recognition—a restraint, perhaps, which has often led to a want of requisite emphasis here and there. The genial culture that prevails, the refinement and simplicity which are characteristic, it has been shown, are combined with a notable breadth of view. It is more than a mere dwelling, a place to eat and sleep which is often regarded as a synonym for home—it is school, altar, shrine. Here the child is taught reverence and his elder self-control. Here education is held to be the truest and most permanent form of wealth, and life considered but preparation for higher existence. Here religion is associated with daily conduct and some self-sacrifice is demanded. Here it is constantly taught that all religions which make for goodness are divine and the pious of all creeds are sharers in future bliss. The universal elements in the olden faith are emphasized in the broadening and more helpful tendencies of the time. Certain picturesque elements when the environment was more exclusive may have passed away, but enough survives to make it a permanent factor for good and an object-lesson to the stranger without the gates.

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